# W. MAXWELL PRINCE

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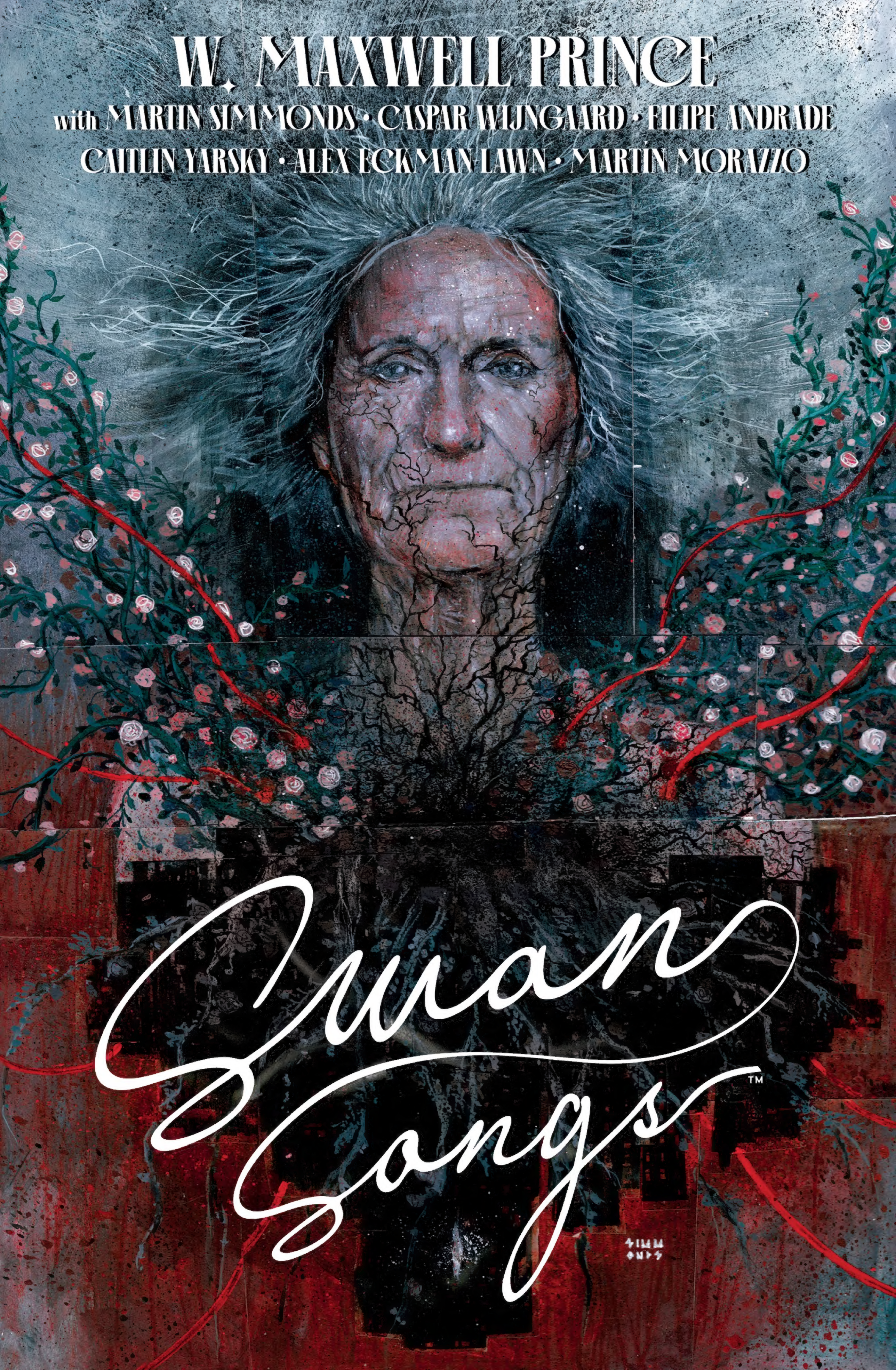

# Dream Songs™

# SWAN SONGS

*Stories about endings*

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**SWAN SONGS**
March 2024. Published by Image Comics, Inc.
Office of Publication: PO BOX 14457, Portland OR 97293.
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*"This life is but the childhood of our immortality."*

---

DENIS JOHNSON, **TREE OF SMOKE**

*Let's begin...*

# Chapter One

## *The end of...the world.*

Before he was trampled to death by an ***angry mob***, my therapist always used to say:

*"Baby steps, Brian.* ***Baby steps.***"

JESUS SAVES

Pretty bad ***Apocalypse*** out there.

It's always **something,** isn't it?

23

*"Small, achievable goals that, over time, can accrue into something larger and more **meaningful.**"*

The **atomic clock's** counting down...

***Hogwash.*** Ain't nothing gonna happen when it hits **zero.**

23

I wouldn't be so sure, Ma.

*"Shrink the world," he'd say. "To something **bite-sized**...something you can **control.**"*

It's all the **same** to me. Nuclear Holocaust, or ***kidney disease?***

Flip a coin and die.

*So when the world started **ending**, I picked something; a **small** something:*

Don't be so ***morose.*** Now, where did we leave off?

Ah, that's right...

**Better Gardens Magazine.** Ma's favorite.

...it keeps her happy during dialysis.

BETTER GARDENS MONTHLY

PENULTIMATE ISSUE!

The best indoor plants chosen by the experts

*"After three days in a vase (with a small piece of copper at the bottom), cut the stems on an angle and place them back in the water..."*

*"The tulips will bloom large, and last for a number of extra weeks. Before wilting begins, arrange them in a small spring bouquet, or lay them flat at the bottom of an Easter basket--"*

*"Everyone loves a surprise tulip!"*

...and that's it. *The last article.*

***Tulips.*** You remember those, Brian?

Yeah, I remember tulips, Ma.

You're a sweet boy, reading all these magazines to me.

There's one more, you know.

What's that?

The magazine. **Better Gardens.** There's *one more issue...*

...Fred down at **Carousel** called about it just before the phones went offline.

*"Fred down at Carousel..."*

Fred's probably **dead**, sweetie.

Yeah, but...

But what if the magazine's *there*? At the shop?

You're talking crazy. It's loony toons from my son's mouth.

**Daffy Duck on drugs!**

I'll be quick, stick to the *underground*.

The **dope fiends** won't even notice me.

It's **madness** out there, Brian. You'll get yourself *killed*, and quick!

***Tt.*** I'll get you your magazine--and we can finish the series **proper**. Just--

NGHHH

MA!

I'm fine, it's *fine*. Just *tired* is all.

Think I might close my eyes for a little....

Okay. You sleep, Mama.

I'll be right back in *no time flat.*

"Something small." **Modest goals.**

Sensible increments...

OUT OF ORDER ON ACCOUNT OF END TIMES

Goddammit.

*Little steps.*

I *miss* my therapist. He didn't take insurance, but he was chock full of good advice.

One thing he was really big on:

Avoiding "*emotional vampires.*"

*Parasitic individuals* who--absent a stable sense of themselves--feed off of ***YOUR*** feelings.

***Cry*** for us, my love...

Show me a frowny face.

Shed a tear, won't you, dear?

A grimace! A rictus!

Sorry, fellas. Nothin' to be sad about.

They want it ***all***. But like Dr. Barber said:

*"They can't suck you dry if you don't give them permission."*

***Penny-pincher!***

Wouldn't even furrow his brow...

(He was speaking ***metaphorically***, of course, but the end of the world makes everything kind of ***confusing***.)

It just hit *seventeen.*

Lord help us all...

Time sure moves quick when it's running out!

If it gets down to **four** I'm going to light myself on fire! I *swear* it!

The clock starts ticking backwards, and everything changes...

One minute, you're taking the subway every Monday through Friday to your cushy, white-collar job.

And the next...

The entire underground rail system is a shantytown for **opioid addicts--**

--folks who just want to be a little *glassy-eyed* when the Earth finally explodes... or achieves **heat death** or *whatever it is* that winds up happening when that goddamn clock finally hits **zero**.

***"Club Oxy..."*** I used to call it the Fort Hamilton F-stop!

Okay, so, one more thing about my therapist:

When I think about it in retrospect,

Like, *pre-him-getting-stampeded-to-a-pulp...*

I guess he was kind of a ***dick*** sometimes?

In addition to all that **helpful** stuff, he also used to say these jerky things like:

*"You're in a codependent relationship with your mother, Brian. You're sacrificing your own happiness and progress for her medical needs..."*

And I was like...

*Fifteen...*

*"Yeah, doc. She's my **mom**. What the heck else am I supposed to do?"*

She's in renal failure, for chrissakes.

...guy made me pay *out of pocket* for every fucking session.

*Give me a Percocet.*

I want a *Percocet*.

I don't have any of that shit, man.

A Tramadol, then. *Hydro*.

***Whatever*** you got in that there pack.

It's not like that. I'm just trying to get a **magazine** for my mom.

*She's got kidney disease...*

***Fuck your mother!!***

I'll find wherever she's holed up and chew her fucking *fingers* off if you don't give me something good!

I mean, she's my mom. She raised me. Gave me everything...

Alright, alright, *calm down*. Just let me get it...

I'd do ***anything*** for her.

Whu--

It don't matter...

Either my teeth in her neck, or the big **kablooey**-- your momma's *a goner* either way.

Flip a coin and ***die***!!

Plus: what does "codependent" even mean?

I'd ask Dr. Barber, but...you know...

My **HSA** is empty anyhow.

They warned us, didn't they?

Told us ***exactly*** what would happen.

Why didn't we listen?!

12

They kept warning us and we didn't listen!

12

This is what I'm talking about. I can't get caught up in fatalistic thinking. It's **unhealthy** for me.

Per what I've learned from hundreds of hours of very expensive counseling, I'm focusing now on only ***small*** things:

The flickering light of the Carousel sign;

The sound of loose change rattling around in my backpack;

CAROUSEL

The--

Hey, let go of me!

Get *off*, I said!

It's always something, isn't it?

Won't you smile for us, sweetheart?

*Ngghh!*

A grin!

A little smirk!

He's just a *kid*, you idiots.

Leave him alone, why don't ya?

***Big hero words!*** A hint of sanctimony in the enunciation!

***Smile*** for me, Superman.

We wanna see ***ALL*** your teeth.

...how 'bout my hammer?

A construction tool!

Ouchy-thing!

He's **stoic**, dearies!

Desperate for a feeling... **Pathetic**.

...if you don't get out of here right now, I can let you know *exactly* what this "ouchy-thing" ***feels*** like.

No kidding.

Now, now. No need for ***violence***, poppet.

...an instrument with which to hit ***nails***!

I say we ***run***, lovelies!

You need ***therapy***, buddy!

*Fucking lunatics.*

You okay, kid? There're so many friggin' weirdos out--

I'm real sorry, mister.

STAB!

Whuhh?

Why??

Guhhh

Are you *kidding* me, man? There ain't nothing in here but ***pennies***!

...put some copper at the bottom of a vase of tulips...

Watch it bloom--

Oh look, I saved you.

...sorry about that.

Fred? What--

OUCH.

It was the **kid**, wasn't it? *Little runt.*

You're the ***third*** one he's nicked this week.

***Nicked?*** That fucker stabbed me right in the gut!

Eh, can you blame him?

Little man's just trying to scrounge up some cash for his sick mom.

***Cancer***, from what I understand.

For his mom...

I'm telling you, Brian. You see it in *high relief* when the clock ticks down near the end.

Everyone's got a ***hole*** inside them the size of a planet--

But they don't know how to *fill it up*; no one knows how to be ***okay***.

**Seven.** *Hh*. Not such a lucky number anymore.

Fred... I came all this way.

Do you have it?

Have ***WHAT?***

We got *looted* right after the phones went down.

...I ain't got **shit** but gauze, hydrogen peroxide, and some stale licorice candies no one ever wanted.

...what about magazines?

***Magazines?*** *Heh.*

"*MAGAZINES,*" he says.

Now that's an ***entirely*** different story.

You try to focus on small things, but in doing so you sometimes miss the ***bigger*** picture:

The world's ending, and everyone's hurting.

We knew it was coming...

Everyone's trying to *feel* ***something***--something unnameable, something they maybe can't even describe.

It's all so *little*... or so **big** we can't wrap our heads around it.

And that's just the thing:

The tiny stuff, and the stuff that's so overwhelmingly huge...

It's all ***bound up together***...like how the forest is just a bunch of individual trees...

***Boo-hoo!*** I think I feel **sad**, dearies.

Me, too!

How lovely, to be sad again!

...or how a mosaic is made of little colored tiles...

STILL OUT OF ORDER PROBABLY FOREVER

"Take enough steps and eventually you'll reach the horizon, Brian."

...my therapist never actually *said* that. But I think he *would*, if he was, you know, ***alive***.

...guy was worth every cent, all told.

Mom! I'm home!

Brian...

The Atomic Clock just hit **two**.

Don't worry about any of that, Ma.

2

Look what I've got.

It's ***real***? You said it and I didn't believe it...

But it's real!

I feel so... so...

*Shhh.* Just lie back and ***listen***.

*Ahem.*

*"Readers of this magazine will be well accustomed to the fact that hydrangeas--especially the mopheads and lacecaps of the macrophylla variety--thrive especially well in a serene spot full of morning sun and afternoon shade."*

"But did you know that you can change the colors of your already-rooted hydrangea petals?"

"...assuming you've fertilized your flower beds in an organic matter--manure or compost are best--your soil should be primed for a little **homemade variegation.**"

"Once the plants have exposed their radiant crowns, add a solution of one tablespoon aluminum sulfate (mixed with one part water) to the soil."

"Now the hard part: **waiting.** You can't set a clock for the miracle of nature!"

"Everything on this earth occurs in small, almost undetectable increments."

"But **wait** long enough, dear reader..."

Remember hydrangeas, Brian?

"...and you'll witness an **explosion** of color that will bring a big, bright smile to your face..."

# Chapter Two

*The end of...a marriage.*

So then both parties are in ***agreement***...

Per the final terms of the divorce, your assets will be ***split*** according to the negotiated schedule.

And, as per the **addendum** signed by both Mr. and Mrs. Newman...

***Hamilton.*** I'm using my maiden name again.

...per the addendum signed by both Mr. Newman and ***Ms. Hamilton***...

The two shall be locked in various styles of ***mortal combat*** for all eternity!

We first met in a grocery store, believe it or not.

SUNMART

I was sifting through the avocados--trying to find that *perfect* one, you know?

I remember it as ***apples***, for some reason. Honeycrisp, maybe? Or Fuji...

He was a little ***too*** eager to talk to me, thinking back on it now.

Uh, hey...

The thing was: my cart had a ***bad wheel*** and kind of *pulled* me in her direction; I had absolutely no intention of buying produce that day.

*Goddamn crazy cart...*

And he *says it*, right there. *The all-time cliche:*

Come here often?

What? *No*. I would never--that's *ridiculous*. I said:

*Sorry*. I always get one with a wonky wheel.

Either way: he was easy on the eyes. I'll give him *that* much.

She was-- *is*, always will be-- ***beautiful***.

He asked me for my number.

Can I get your number?

What sane person wouldn't ask for her number?

And that was that-- the ***match*** was lit...

The one with the **spikes.**

*Yeah,* this'll do just fine.

The **sword,** *naturally.*

CHYAH!

CHYAH!

Ouch...

I was miserable with you, John.

You're the worst thing that ever happened to me.

KLANK

FUCK YOU!

You first, Romeo.

HGH!

It... was...

Apples.

Avocados, you fucking idiot.

But those *early* days...

My god, the first few ***years***...

We were *inseparable*. Joined at the hip.

***Symbiotic.***

*One organism* sharing ***everything.***

We even sat on the same side of the booth at restaurants.

***Really.***

And we couldn't keep our hands off each other...

Oh, John!

We did it ***everywhere***. The back of a cab...

In the stalls of a million dive bar bathrooms...

EXIT

Once, in the dressing room of a *clothing store*.

*Oh my God, **JOHN**!!*

My vision narrowed to a single point: ***her***.

It was ***him*** and only him.

We got married at the courthouse--we didn't want anything big or showy.

We didn't *need* anyone else.

And I had a little nest egg, which helped us get a modest place just outside the city...

I loved that tiny home. The walls smelled like... I think the flower is ***wisteria?***

Is that what it's called?

Every morning, breakfast sitting across from each other.

...freshly picked berries from our dinky backyard garden, bacon grease still sizzling in the pan...

Every night, falling asleep to the dulcet sound of reruns...

You tell yourself there's *no such thing* as **perfection**...

...but then all of a sudden you're ***living it.***

We never even ***thought*** of buying a second tooth-brush.

***Symbiotic***, like I said.

That house. Those early days--

It was as **good** as it ever got.

***Wisteria*** was right; It smelled of wisteria.

The ***Bushido code*** is predicated upon eight unassailable **virtues**...

Moral rectitude; courage.

Politeness; honesty.

Honor;

Loyalty;

Self-control;

***Mercy!***

*Jesus Christ, Eileen!*

Sounds like you read the entire Samurai Wikipedia...

***Congratu-fucking-lations!***

***HYAH!***

*Politeness?*

I've seen you make a waitress feel so ***small*** she almost cried into my soup bowl!

***GAH!***

**Travis** admitted the whole thing to me!

*Loyalty?* You **fucked** one of your colleagues on a business trip!

戦

And self-control?

SELF-CONTROL?!

Hi-yah!

How many glasses of white wine do you have a night?

Three? *Four?*

真朱

I wouldn't have to drink so much if you were more of a man.

AHHH!!!!

*Mercy*, huh? Is that what the Bushido says?

Mercy?!

John...

Never.

I don't know what it was that made everything start to *fall apart*...

Oh, I remember *exactly* what it was. ***The precise moment.***

...she had been working these long hours at the accounting firm--just *grueling* stuff.

His employment at the time was...***fluid***; he bounced around from thing to thing.

I **hated** having a boss. I don't like other people telling me what to do. I'd rather be *broke!*

I *know* you shouldn't care about money. But being the breadwinner was **HARD.**

She was the breadwinner, absolutely. But I kept the house in order, *pulled my weight* where I could.

He considered being a **neat-freak** some kind of sacred virtue.

If not for me, we would have been living in ***squalor***!

Anyway, here I am, just swamped with tax returns...

...and then I get ***the call***...

Oh, no.

I wasn't close with my father. He was, like all men in my life, in a permanent state of arrested development. *Emotionally stunted.*

I just needed him to **be there** for me, you know? A strong presence.

An anchor, a ***ballast***...

My daddy's ***dead***...

I froze. I didn't know what to say.

Maybe he's in a better place now?

It was just...the most ***hackneyed*** shit you could think of.

I needed **empathy**--but got a fucking ***cliché***!

She started sleeping with her back turned to me. That was...***new***.

A small *fissure*...and then it breaks open into this gaping, unbridgeable ***distance***.

She went on ***business trips***; I ate breakfast alone.

...and cleaned the house.

*Always* cleaning.

What in the flying *fuck* is "***hyper-futuristic Kirby-esque Luminal Engagement***"?

Oh, how surprising...

You didn't read the **fine print** on the divorce papers.

You never were one for *attention to detail...*

I didn't really *need* to read 'em, hon.

I got... the **gist** just...

*Fine!*

*GAH!*

**ZAPP!**

You tell yourself there's no such thing as **perfection**...

Because it's ***true***.

Anything **good**--anything that seems like it might be nice, worthwhile, fulfilling...

It ***changes***.

Right. The hotel at the *accounting expo.*

Well, thanks for telling me, Travis...

EVIL BREAD

*The Rule of Combustion:* a fire eventually goes ***out.***

Like I said, an *unbridgeable distance.*

***Chasm*** might be the best word for it.

I started spending a lot of time at the bar. Can you really blame me?

I do blame him. For **everything.**

That was *rhetorical--*I blame myself.

*Barkeep.* Another.

...for ***every-thing.***

It starts off so simple: avocados.

Eiko

*Apples.*

JOHN-

But the *sweetness* is strained from the fruit...

Eiko

It *rots to the fucking core*, is what happens.

JOHN-

It all turns black, given enough time.

Come here often?

The ***truth***: love is violence.

ZUMM!

Love is pain.

Fucking... bitch...

Love is a battle.

Love is hurting each other--

Over and over again.

Well, I guess that's *that*.

...this is the *last* of it.

...make sure the strawberry plants get enough water. They're so ***finicky***.

I *know*, John.

Right... see you at the mediation, then.

Bye.

*Also* the truth:

Love is **wonderful.**

...it ***is***!

Love is ***light***. Pure, unadulterated.

FLIP!

Love is loud sex in a dressing room...

Love is quiet nights on the couch, dozing off to *Seinfeld*...

Love is--

is...

Love, love, love!

# Chapter Three

*The end of...the end of the world.*

# The New Bible: Genesis, Part 1

In the beginning, **Adeline** emerged from her bunker full of non-perishable cans and field ration MREs.

(And the VHS player with the box set of *Little House on the Prairie*, and the seven volumes of **Advanced Level Sudoku** that she'd finished months ago.)

Now the Earth was formless and empty, *darkness* over the surface of the deep, and the sour tang of ***radiation*** hovered in the air...

Also, too, in the beginning: **Evan** emerged from *his* respective bunker, which was stocked with large amounts of no-expiration liquid meal supplements and dry cereal.

(And his **Zombie Survival Guide Volume 2**, and all his *Zombie Apocalypse* novels, which he'd grabbed in a harried rush right before the **Atomic Clock** struck 4...)

The landscape: not much to speak of. Pretty *decimated*, actually-- **Nuclear Holocaust** and all that.

And Evan, filled with a kind of *fearful awe* for the blazing neon-green tint of everything, heard from behind him a rare sound: ***human language.***

Is it *over?*

And there before him, a **girl**--small but also kinda...*big? Larger than life*, somehow. Petite--and ***planet-sized***.

Did the **bomb** go off?

Evan assessed the **sickening panorama**: the grass-turned-to-ash; the crumbling buildings in the distance; the ***absence*** of that ambient hum the wind usually makes...

I think so...

***Witness here!***

The first two beings of **New Creation**; the proto-parents of this era *post* eras.

**Adeline** and **Evan** walked toward the horizon--or what it *used* to be, anyhow.

Now? Mostly just a haze of light flickering in the distance, like a bar sign on the *fritz*.

Name's **Evan**, by the way.

I'm **Adeline.**

On their journey they did encounter creatures totally ***NEW***--nameless, *pre-nomenclature...*

...and *weird as hell.*

Evan calls this one "**bird with antennae.**"

And *this*: "**dog as big as a sycamore.**"

Not to mention: **cockroaches.**

...forever unchanged. Creatures of pure *survival instinct.*

Gross, grubby little **geniuses!**

After some kilometers, the Mother and Father of **Eden** arrived at...well...

What is it?

I think it's a bunch of different *stuff* melded together into a, like...***tree?***

...and so they called it "**Tree.**"

Proclaiming ***Tree*** a kind of **domestic anchor**, the two did venture out (never *too* far) to see if provisions could be found--**sustenance** being pretty *top-of-mind*, now that they were both out of their bunkers.

In an abandoned house to the East, Evan found: *canned goods*; bagged soil; seeds of tomato, red bell pepper, corn, and other assorted vegetables and flowers...

And in a dilapidated shed to the West, Adeline found: a pick-axe; a butcher knife; **cutlery** of seemingly endless variety.

With these found objects (and miscellaneous others, from other miscellaneous excursions) Adeline and Evan did make Tree their home.

They didn't know each other all that well, but it seemed the *natural* thing to do--who else was there, anyhow?

Are these pinto beans?

*Cannellini*, I think.

Under **Tree** they planted seeds;

Patches of sow-able land were found, dug up, patted down with spades.

As they waited for the crops to take root, Evan would read to Adeline from his beloved *books*.

*"And then they saw the **zombie horde** on the horizon, gross and **hungry**. The survivors knew they'd be in for the fight of their lives..."*

Time passed...

And the crops took! Walls of **vegetation** (tomatoes, summer squash, cornstalks, marigolds, root vegetables, *et al*) spread around the tree not unlike the plume of a mushroom cloud.

(They cultivated **mushrooms**, too, incidentally.)

And something *else* did grow there, under the eaves...

Evan! Come look.

Are those... *cannellini beans?*

Nu uh. **Pinto.**

Evan found that he **adored** the way Adeline's hair curled around her ear in little Cs--he imagined they were saying, *"Come, come, come to me, Evan."*

...and Adeline liked the way Evan read to her--she had never been a *genre girl*, per se, but the novels were **riveting**--fast-paced, and well written.

The "survival guides" were full of what seemed to her to be pretty good advice, where zombie invasions were concerned.

"***Survival Tip 245:*** *If you see the horde for even a millisecond, ready your weapons immediately--*"

"*...brandish your blades and your pistols. Do* ***NOT*** *let the monsters inside, at any cost.*"

"*If they get too close, some might try to trick you with their backwards words--but, remember* ***Survival Mantra 26:*** *Be Steadfast!*"

And Evan was sorta ***handsome***, she thought.

With not much else to do to pass the time, they started to make love every night under **Tree**.

...sometimes during the day, too.

...and eventually, as these things tend to go, Adeline found herself **with child.**

What have we done here, Ev? *What did we do?*

We created **Paradise,** honey.

*Yes. Paradise.*

# The New Bible: Genesis, Part 2

About fifty or so miles from Paradise, in the city center, down in a basement lab surrounded on all sides by reinforced concrete, there did work three individuals of that old, lost vocation: ***scientist***.

Genevieve, Chris, and Lonny, they were called.

...and they were *about their work*--a truly **holy** undertaking.

**Radiation** levels are still high, but have dipped to a place where it's reasonable to go *out there* in hazmats.

"Out there."

There ain't nothing *left*, Gen.

Probably not. But that's the whole **point**, right?

Not *YET*.

Their project, down in that subterranean lab, bore a **name:**

The Center for the Rehabilitation of a Post-Nuclear World.

Amongst their store: the cells of rare animals; seedlings of endless variety; **literature**--the *ideas*, now like hieroglyphs, of that benighted world before the clock flashed its final goose egg.

We're gonna rebuild Planet Earth, guys.

We ***survived***-- there has to be a reason for that.

Chris and Lonny found it hard to argue with her rationale.

And so the three scientists (*what a word!*) did ready themselves for their excursion into the toxic aftermath:

The cells and the seeds and the books were packed into rucksacks;

Their airtight hazmat suits were **triple-checked**, lest the poisonous atmosphere make them *crazy* and *paranoid* (irradiated molecules having a reputation to make the unmasked think... ***irrationally.***)

Hello, world.

They climbed through the silo chamber, across a ladder never-ending.

...and did emerge into the hostile world like three be-suited baby birds!

*Wow.*

...you sure said it.

From there they made their way through the rubble of--*whatever* this city used to be called (*does it even matter now?*).

Everything was gone...

Except for the ***cockroaches,*** of course.

...and eventually arrived at the place where the land laid down **flat** for miles.

That ***shape*** on the horizon...

So they made their way to **Tree**...

# The New Bible: Genesis, Part 3

Exhausted from an afternoon of love-making, Adeline glimpsed something *strange* in the distance.

Ev, I think I'm glimpsing something *strange* in the distance.

I'm with ya there, babe.

It was, of course, the scientists, from **Part 2** of this 3-part Genesis.

"HORDE."

But our lovers of this New Era didn't ***know*** that...

The scientists trudged through the field, toward Tree, Adeline and Evan's paradise coming into higher relief with each step.

I think there are *people* living under that thing.

They grew a fucking ***garden!***

*Unbelievable.* It's everything we'd hoped for.

...they trudged on.

But there was, as you might have guessed by now, a bit of a **problem** here:

Certain people take certain books very seriously.

...and so Evan and Adeline scrambled to *ready* themselves according to the dictates of the **Survival Guide.** (Both of them had internalized it via Evan's *dulcet* reading voice.)

*"And then they saw the **zombie horde** on the horizon, gross and **hungry.** The survivors knew they'd be in for the fight of their lives..."*

*"...brandish your blades. Do **NOT** let the monsters inside, at **any** cost."*

I'm gonna try to make *contact.*

Careful, Lonny.

They're ***survivors***, Jen. Like **us.**

Greetings, fellow *homo sapiens!*

*I'm Lonny,* a scientist with the **CRPNW!** We're--

*Backwards words.* **Survival Mantra 26:** *"Be steadfast."*

*"Strike quickly."*

What the fuck?!
LONNY!!

Perhaps, someday, you'll take the words of ***this*** book seriously.

**New Genesis**, the story of the *first two beings* who awoke in an irradiated Eden.

But I kinda doubt it.

There's plenty of *other* stuff to read.

Please... wait...

S-see... I'm like *you.*

*What did we do?*

Take this. It's up to ***you*** now.

Make a **new world.**

...and take care of that ***baby.***

Make a new--

Worlds end; worlds begin anew.
Cain slays Abel; brother kills brother.
...would that we could tell a *new* kind of story.
Maybe someday...

# SWAN SONGS

A COMIC **FULL OF** Fill-In Sentences

This is a comic book about a guy named Bobby (NAME) and the end of his "sentence" (DOUBLE ENTENDRE). It was written (as such) and named W. Maxwell Prince (WRITER) and drawn by Caitlin Yarsky (ARTIST) [illegible] information: it is Issue 4 (CHAPTER) of the series "Swa[illegible] purchsed for $3.99 US (PRICE).

# Chapter Four

## *The end of...a sentence.*

I can't believe it. ***Bobby Halburn's*** last day.

BUXOM BOOTY

Wish I could say I was gonna miss you, Tom.

That breaks my heart, kiddo. That really cuts to the quick.

Hey...

Give me a color and an animal.

Oh, and a ***food***.

*Hmm.* How 'bout..

**Green...an elephant...**

Oh, and ***oatmeal***. I had it for breakfast.

Green... elephant... oatmeal...

***Ha!*** I like this one.

# BAD LIBS

SUPER WACKY Fill-In Sentences

It was a cold ___autumn___ day, and I woke to the smell of ___elephant___
SEASON NOUN

in my palatial ___prison cell___ . The sky was a deep, dark ___green___ and
WHERE YOU ARE COLOR

___Tom the correction officer___ said, "Hey, ___DUMBASS___ there's a whole bunch
PERSON IN FRONT OF YOU YOUR NICKNAME

of ___oatmeal___ on your head! Boy, I should be more careful when I eat.
FOOD

"...very specific fill-in sentences..."

SAD LIBS

VERY specific Fill-In Sentences

A super silly way to make...

I got it at the checkout line at the grocer's.

Right next to all those *conspiracy magazines*.

...did you know **Elvis** is still alive? The *real* one.

Someone saw him walking in the desert, dressed head-to-toe in all white...

Tom...

SAD LIBS

*Thanks*, man.

SAD LIBS

Eh, it's nothing.

"Good luck out there, kiddo."

Robert Halburn, for release.

It's my personal belief--***me***, Bobby Halburn, two minutes from *penitentiary discharge*--that ***freedom*** is a joke.

Winner winner, chicken dinner.

--a cruel and elaborate ***hoax*** the TV likes to play on all our minds.

One pack of cigarettes, one dictionary.

One pocket thesaurus with the cover ripped off. Two ballpoint pens...

Sign here and the *treasure's* all yours.

*Congratu-lations.*

...see you next time around.

BURN

Whether it's guys working out in the fields, or the pit boss breathing down their necks...

The sun's going down early...

Don't you just love how the sky turns a million shades of blue?

Not a single one of them is "free".

We're *all* under ***someone's*** thumb.

Tom told me about you. You're the **word games** guy...

"*Give me a verb,*" right?

There's *other* words for **blue**, you know.

Cerulean. Azure. Celeste.

***Lazuline.*** You ever heard of that one? *Laz-oo-leen.*

Friends, family, your boss, the government, God. Don't matter. ***You pick.***

Enjoy your *early liberation* under these **lazuline** skies, Mr. Halburn.

I'm sure as hell gonna try.

Someone's always pressing down...

*Locking* the door behind you...

Brother, oh brother of mine...

Get in the car, ***dumbass.***

Thanks for coming to get me, Kurt.

It's not like there's *anyone else* around to do it...

Dad's still ***dead.***

And Mom's, well...

...she wrote me a *letter.*

...except she spelled my ***name*** wrong on the envelope. **Curt**, with a ***C.***

That's why I like **Libs** so much. Mad Libs, Bad Libs, *Sad Libs*...

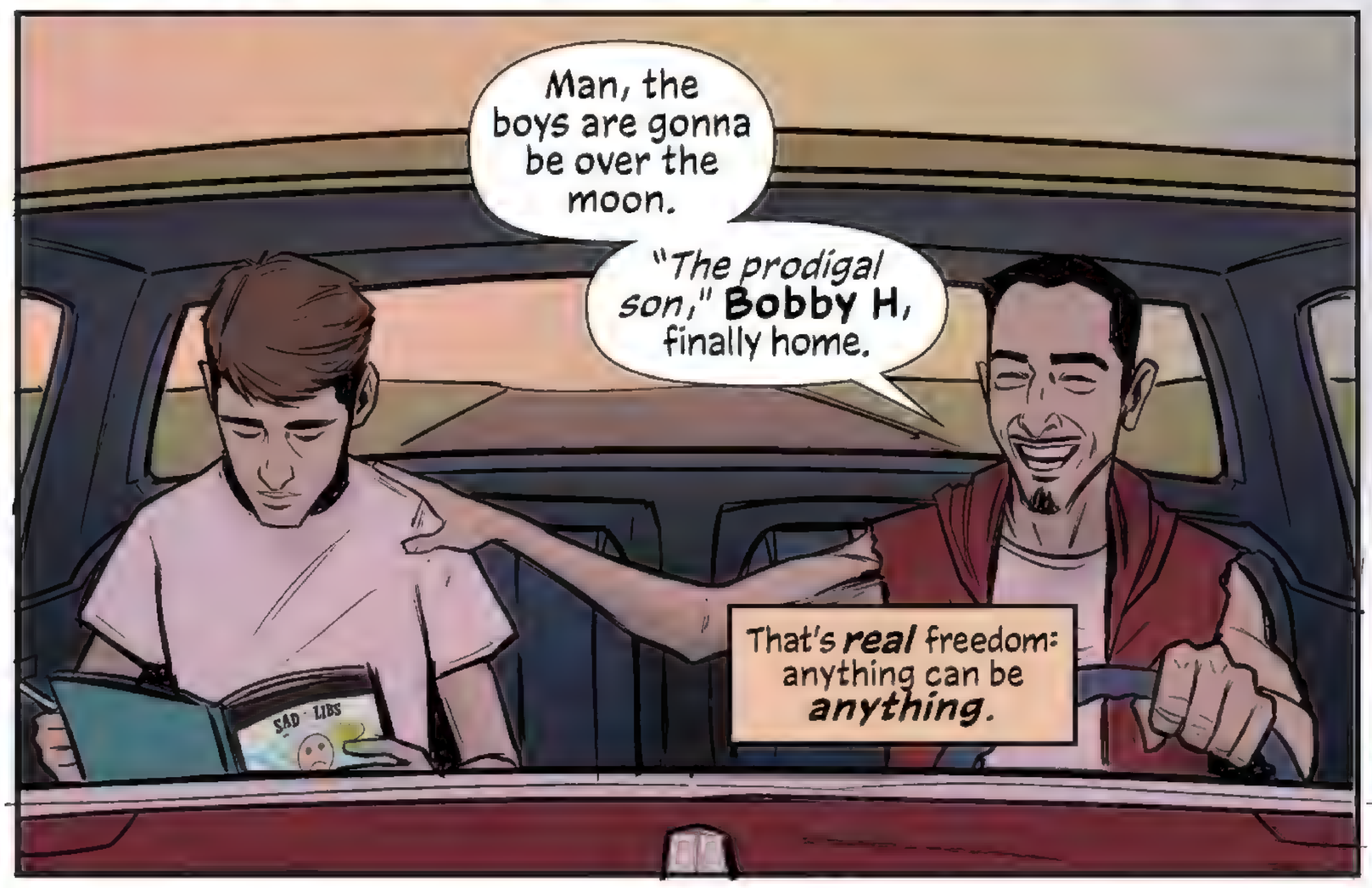
There are no ***mistakes...***

Anyhow, she says they took some **time** off her sentence.

Anything can be anything:

You can have a **TIGER** driving a **CADDY**...

With a little luck, Momma Halburn might get out of prison before her *hundredth* birthday!



# SAD ☹ LIBS

VERY *specific* Fill-In Sentences

My brother picked me up in his Cadillac and drove me through
RELATIVE — VEHICLE

the fallow midwest land. I saw a golfer on tiger-back out the window,
ADJECTIVE + PLACE — SPORTS PLAYER ON ANIMAL

which made me happy/confused. We're on our way to the SAFE HOUSE
HOW YOU FEEL RIGHT NOW — PLACE

to say hello to a bunch of criminals I grew up with. I am not one bit excited!
PEOPLE WHO WILL BE AT THE PLACE — AMOUNT

Bobby Dumbass!

My little man, out of the clink!

Hi, Riz.

Welcome back to the bright side, Bobby-boy.

Thanks, Big Stu.

Will you all give him some *space*? Guy's been cramped in **small rooms** for two years!

The dining hall was actually a lot bigger than this...

Hear that, Kurt? Your palace ain't so ***palatial*** after all.

So, **Bobby-boy**...me and Stu are *dying* to know...

What do **YOU** think of Kurt's *big plan?*

Plan?

You idiot! I told you I wasn't gonna tell him until **later.**

Tell me *what?*

Let's go have a beer on the porch, little brother...

I got a thing I been turning over in my mind.

American Lager, your favorite.

I've been home like *five minutes*, Kurt.

I know, I know...but hear me out, man:

The **bank** wants to take the house. And we need cash--***BAD.***

So you've got some kinda *grand scheme*, is that it?

*Yeah, man.* I do.

And I think this one's actually pretty *solid*...

I just spent two years in jail. ***Two.***

I don't got a lot of interest in going *back*...

I'll have you remember, brother o'mine: you mighta took the ***fall*** for the last one...

But I took a fucking ***bullet*** for you.

...I still can't move all my fingers, on account of the *nerve damage*...

You ***owe*** me, Bobby-boy.

So on Thursday morning, you're gonna be out front with Riz and Big Stu, packing up the van, doing ***exactly*** what I say.

You don't got a ***choice*** in the matter.

"What are you writing?"

Nothing that makes any *sense.*

Bobby...

Two years is a ***long*** time. And you and I--

It's okay, Diana. It's not like we were *engaged.*

But is the kid... ***mine?***

*He's five months old,* Bobby. It'd be *impossible.*

God, you really are ***shit*** at math.

burps

*Heh.* I suppose I've always been more of a ***words*** guy.

So **Kurt**...he wants you to rob a bank...

*...dressed up as Presidents...*

Isn't that just the same as ***Point Break***?

That's what *I* said. But *here* we'd apparently go as the ***Founding Fathers***.

Colonial garb, the jackets with the epaulets...

Please tell me you aren't gonna use *muskets*...

Kyle's the guy with the plan.

I'm just along for the ride...

That's ***bullshit***, Bobby.

You got a *say*. We all do.

It's called ***free will.***

I'm not sure I *believe* that, Diana. You can make ***choices***, sure...

But it's all within this kind of...*existing structure.*

It's just...

I think I might have been ***freer*** behind bars than I am out here.

Does that make any sense?

# SAD ☹ LIBS

VERY *specific* Fill-In Sentences

I'm sitting in a diner (WHERE YOU ARE) with my ex-girlfriend (PERSON ACROSS FROM YOU) and she's got a baby (WHAT THAT PERSON IS HOLDING) that belongs to NOT ME (phew!) (WHOM IT BELONGS TO). And then tomorrow (TIME) I'm going to dress up in a George Washington costume, I think? (WEIRD OUTFIT) and do crime (ACTIVITY) with my brother and his goons (Riz and Big Stu) (GROUP OF PEOPLE) because I GUESS I JUST HAVE TO (REASON).

THE NEXT DAY

Let's go, Dumbass.

I feel *ridiculous*, Kurt.

You ain't even done yet...

*Put that on.*

There. Like a crisp *dollar bill.*

Kurt's plan is very

(ADJECTIVE)

**Noon** *exactly*. That's when the money truck stops in front of the bank and opens its doors.

You gotta see the two security guards:

One's as **old** as Moses, and the other's *fatter* than our uncle Ted.

Ted actually wrote me while I was inside. He got *gastric bypass*...

He's ***skinny*** now.

Will you shut the fuck up, Wordsworth?

This is why you're relegated to ***lookout***...

...meanwhile, Me, Stu, and Riz hop out, waving **artillery**.

Those two doofuses will be so *confused*--they'll have no idea what they're looking at.

We collect the cash in duffel bags, and nobody gets hurt.

***Easy peasy.***

"*Easy peasy*". That's a nice little phrase.

But it's just ***ONE*** of the ways a thing can go...

NAT BANK

NAT BANK

The guards were ***supposed*** to be old and fat.

But turns out: *these* guys, the ones working today?

They're ***BIG***. And pretty *capable-looking*, to boot...

It don't matter. We still got the upper hand. Stick to the ***plan***.

And Bobby: if something *does* go wrong...

...you ***ram*** this van into anyone left on two legs.

*Under-stand?*

Yeah, Kurt.

I under-stand.

But the truth is: I *don't* understand.

Hands at your sides! Nice and slow, fellas.

I don't understand why some things go one way, and some things go another.

Is this...

Or if we ever have any ***choice*** in the proceedings...

Is this like a *Point Break* thing?

Shut the fuck up and put the money in the bags.

We don't wanna hurt anyone!

Oh, no...

Riz!!

BLAM BLAM

*Free will?* That'd be pretty neat.

BLAM BLAM

Gah!

No, no, no...

If I could end the sentences any way I wanted...

I'd have today be VERY DIFFERENT.

We'd be shooting SKEET at an AMUSEMENT PARK under a LAZULINE sunset.

BLAM BLAM

But life ain't a *Lib*, is it?

Big Stu...

Hands in the air! Now!

Anything *can't* be anything.

...it's always *something*.

Alright, man. You got me...

Put the gun on the ground and kick it over to me.

Bobby-boy! *Plan B!*

I want to *fill in the blanks* of my future...

One last warning, *mother-fucker.*

But I don't know what to ***write.***

*Goddammit, Bobby.* ***DO IT!!***

# SAD ☹ LIBS

VERY *specific* Fill-In Sentences

Bobby _____ ram the van into the man holding the gun.
PICK ONE: DOES / DOES NOT

This would be the first of many such acts in his _____ time on
ADJECTIVE

Earth. He lives until the age of _____, and spends the remainder of his
NUMBER

days _____. The lesson here is that a person _____
HOW HE SPENDS THEM — PICK ONE: DOES / DOES NOT

have a choice in the way their life goes. Free will is _____.
YOUR THOUGHTS ON FREE WILL

Good luck to you, _____. May you be free and happy for always.
YOUR NAME

# Chapter Five

## *The end of...anhedonia.*

...I'll be performing what's called a ***soft induction***.

...some *light hypnosis*, by which we will travel down into the basement of your **sub-conscious** to address your...***problem***.

Are you ready, Albert?

Yes.

There is not a single thing on this Earth that I enjoy. That's my "problem."

Sunshine, cuisine, a good movie...

It's all a bunch of ***bullshit.***

**Amusement parks** make me absolutely *sick* to my stomach--

I can see right through those *costumed mice* and glittering princesses, down, down, down to the **capitalistic** core of the whole shameless endeavor.

...and don't even get me started on kids' birthday parties!

Do you attend a lot of birthday parties for children, Albert?

No, but that's not the ***point.***

It's all those fucking *balloons*, the table coverings, the high-sugar juice boxes...

What about your **friends?**

***Ha!*** Good one, Doc.

There is ***no*** environment in which I feel more **alone** than when I'm surrounded by a group of friends.

...I drink gin-and-ginger-ales while everyone around me, in the *exact same voice*, says,

*"Remember that thing that happened that one time?"*

Of ***course*** I remember it.

It just wasn't that *great*. It was--

...you were just ***silent*** for *fifteen minutes*, Albert.

Really? It only felt like a couple seconds...

That's the thing about **trance work**. *One minute* of clock time can be an ***hour*** inside.

*...or vice versa.*

I grew up in this house.

How is a **tree** fed?

...water flows from the bottom, up to the leaves...

...it takes *time*.

In your *subconscious*, there is **no time**.

...but there **are** *questions*.

For instance: why are we in your childhood home?

This is where **he** is.

WHO?

WHO?

WHO?

WHO??

WHO?

I'm going to be ***quiet*** now and let you do some *free association.*

*I'm right here in the room, if you need me.*

***Right.*** Thanks a million, Doc.

Just focus on what you feel. What you ***SEE.***

Feel....feel pieced together made from different parts

CollagEd

And there are fucking ***goblins*** in here, with slantwise **teeth** and faces like beat-up *baseball mitts.*

...I see a **goldfish** I once owned--his name was **George** --flying past me at like *eight times his actual size.*

(I forgot to feed him for a few weeks and found him belly-up in cloudy tank water.)

I see the **hole** where ***HE*** used to be.

WHO

...I see a library that doesn't look like other libraries.

Books float aloft and *rearrange* themselves onto shelves in no particular order...

And then...one ***chooses*** me...

Can you hear me, Albert? Is my voice coming through?

Yeah, Doc. It's *echoing* through the whole god-damn place.

This ***place*** is just an extension of **YOU**, remember. Your *files*, kept in ***books***.

...I don't suppose you've ever heard of the concept of ***Shoshin***?

Is that like a *Samurai* thing?

No, you're thinking of **Bushido**. **SHOSHIN** is the ***Beginner's Mind***.

...it's a *Buddhist* tenet. One of the many lessons we *now* attribute to the fat wise man under the Bodhi tree...

"In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert's mind there are few..."

No experts. Just imagine it:

***Impressions*** pure and unadulterated. *Unburdened* by cynicism and history and experience.

If we could approach life's manifold circumstances with the mind of a ***beginner...***

Well, we'd be experiencing it-- **EVERYTHING**-- with a special sort of *openness*. The openness of

A child.

...this is my old room.

WUT IS RUUM?

The Place Where Me Used to Be

My secret safe...

I kept everything in here. Comics, candy.

*Condoms* and nudey mags, later on...

13, 35, 42...
*Open sesame.*

*Oh.*

What's a condom?

I... know you.

Pft!

**No one** can know the inscrutable, indecipherable, indefatigable

**CAPTAIN SUBURBIA!**

Keeper of the green gardens, of the tomato and strawberry plants. Defender of squirrels! Nemesis of Brendan B., the dreaded bully of Tenneson Creek.

*Captain.* I have a question for you...

...what did we used to *like*? What made us ***happy***?

***Everything!***

*Every-thing?*

Roller-coasters that tied your stomach into knots...

WHOOOO!

Red licorice laces. *Sour blue guys*. Chocolate pretzels. Oh, and *jelly beans*...

The **song** the windshield wipers make on a rainy day.

Sha-woosh. *Sha-woosh.* **Sha-woosh.**

**Comic books.** Boxes and boxes of 'em.

1 BIG BOY COMICS

100

THE BEST KID IN TOWN!

BRAVE AND COOL

We wanted to **be** in one.

CAPTAIN SUBURBIA AND THE TERROR OF BRENDAN B.!

I haven't read a comic book in like fifteen years...

Those gremlins sure look **hungry**, *Mister-Me.*

NEXT ISUE: BULLY BEWARE!

1 BIG BOY COMICS

SZZZZZ!

*Hey...*

You wanna get out of here?

I think we *HAVE* to!!

*Run, Captain!*

No thinking. No intellectualizing. Just ***run***...

Like you're doing it for the very *first* time.

What **were** those?

I'm not sure, but my best guess:

***Preconceived notions.***

They hang out in here.

Pretty much *everyone's* got 'em.

I think the house is...

***Leaving.***

Yeah, they *demolished* our subdivision in '97.

...replaced it with a shopping mall.

These are really good!

*Duh.* The ***BEST.***

*Oh.* I--

Hey, I've got a question for ***you***...

...do Mom and Dad stay together?

***Albert?***

***Albert?***

***Albert?***

***Albert?***

***Albert?***

Are you okay?

It can take a few minutes to *readjust* to the room after being in such a deep trance...

***The boy.*** I was just about to tell him--

You've been out of trance for *ten minutes*, Albert.

You've been talking to ***me***.

...and you were saying that you had found ***him***.

***Who is Him?***

I gotta go...

We still have fifteen minutes left in the session!

That's the thing about *trance work*, Doc...

*Time* don't mean ***squat***!

SLAM!

CANDY SHOP

CANDY

OPEN

The *laces*, the blue guys...

FRY'S CHOCOLATE

Oh, and some chocolate-covered pretzels!

Man, I used to love this stuff. But my goddamn *metabolism*.

You get older and it all changes.

Trance therapy is ***really*** weird...

But I swear it's worth every dollar.

Ok, Esme. Time to blow out the candles.

*Good job, sweetie!*

Happy birthday, kiddo.

ENjoy iT for as long As you can.

## Chapter Six

*The end of...**the sidewalk.***

# Swan Songs™

*poems about endings by*

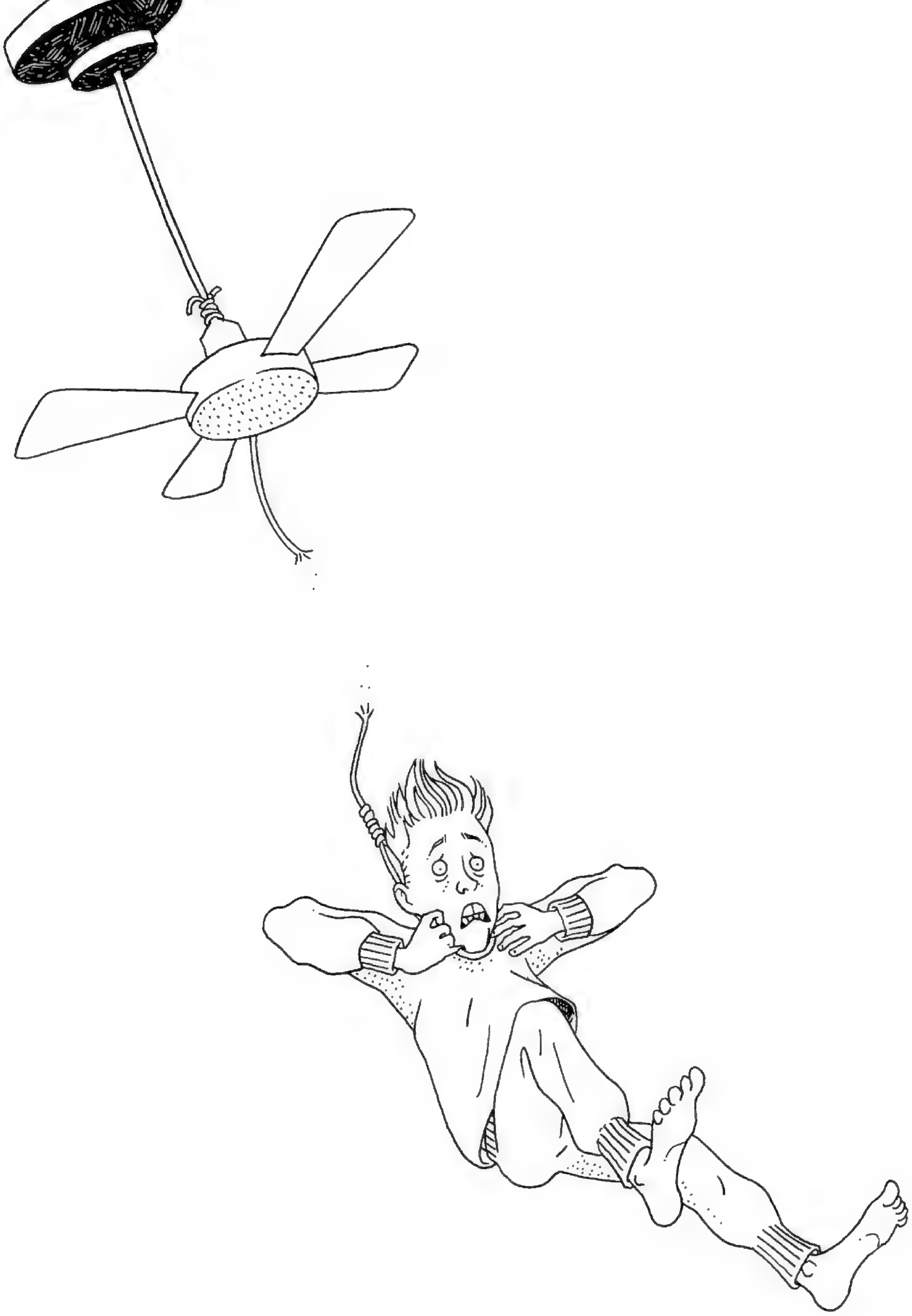
*W. Maxwell Prince*

*with illustrations by*

*Martín Morazzo*

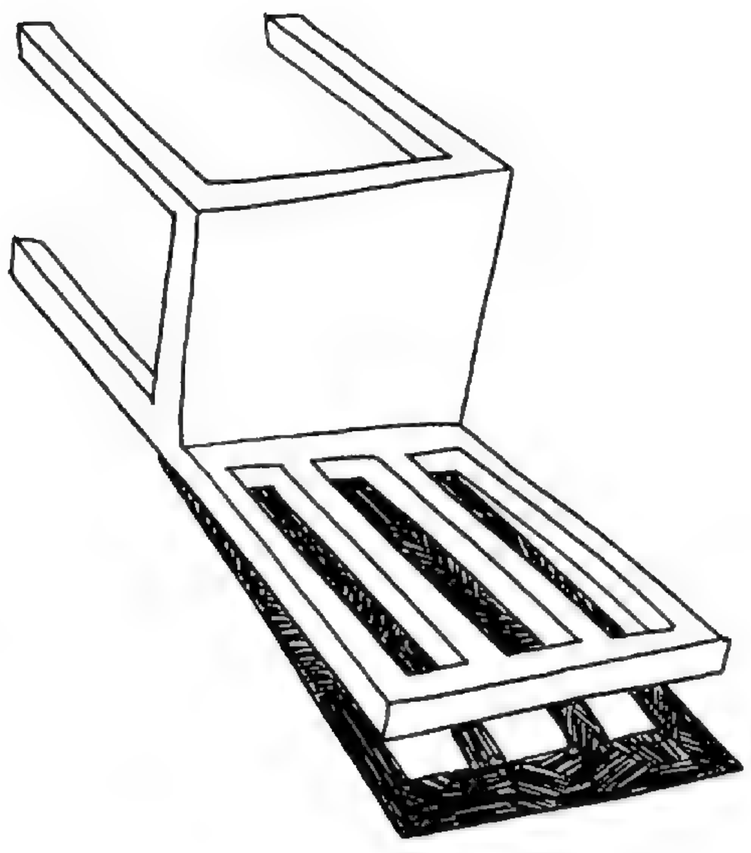
## INVITATION

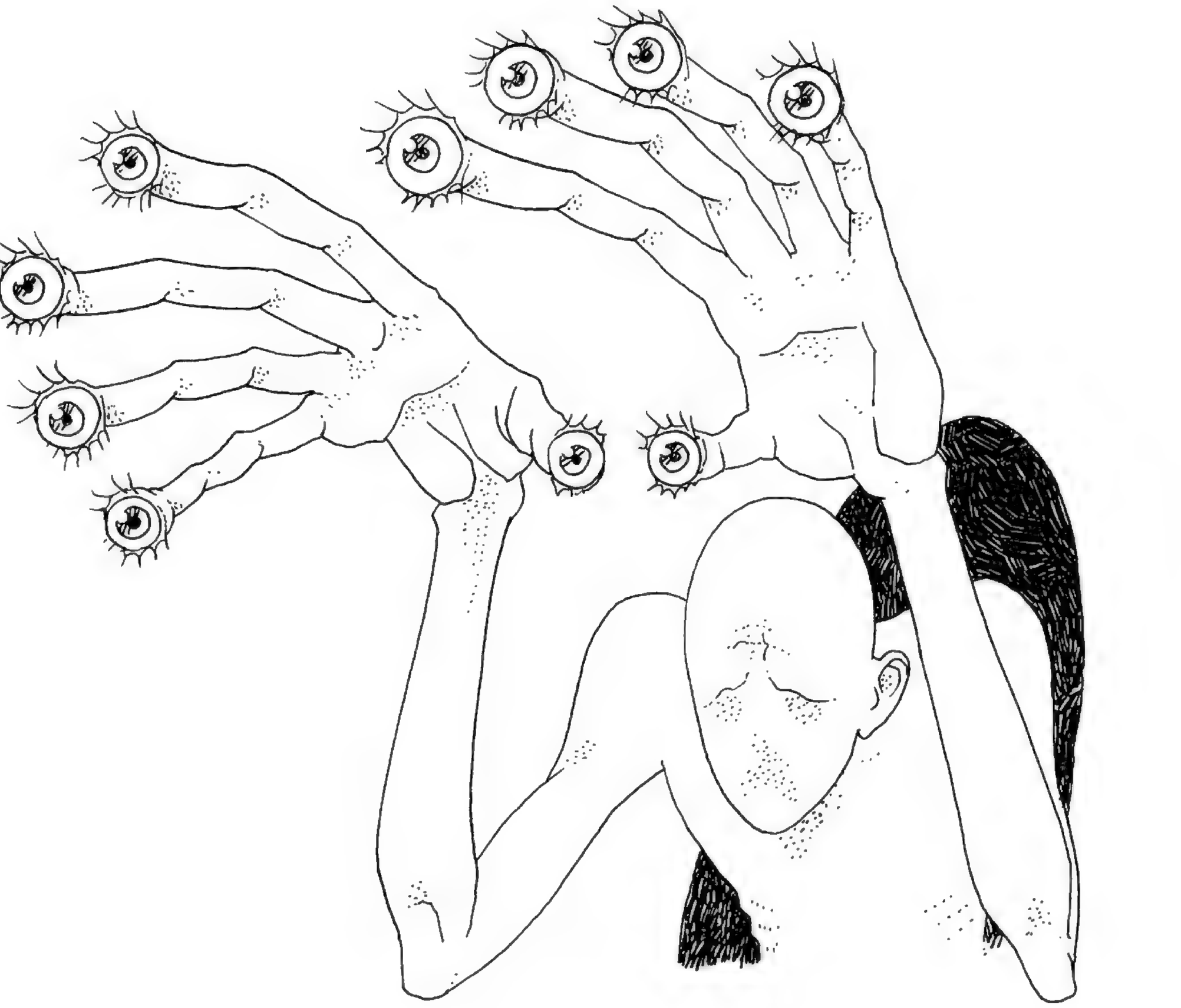
If you're a total sad sack, come in,
If you're a loner, a bummer, a phony,
A bullshit artist, full of baloney…
If you're hopeless and lost, hop right on this word-pony
For we have some jet-black yarns to spin.
Come in, my friends.
Come in!



## THIN FIBERS

Thomas had been seeing things,
(Stuff that wasn't there)
So he tied the rope around the fan
And stepped onto a chair.
He kicked the seat, the rope drew taut
He felt his neck contract
But just as he was passing out...
WHOOPS—the rope done snapped!





## PEEPERS, JEEPERS

One of Tommy's many visions
Was this peculiar, peering man
Who had no clothes, no skin, no mouth,
Just eyes upon his hands.
Every finger had an iris
(A pupil and sclera, too)
So he *could* be counting up to ten...
Or might be **staring** straight at YOU.
Thomas told the docs about it
And they put him on more pills
But the man with eyes upon his hands
Was there, a-looking, *still*.

## A POEM BY THOMAS'S WIFE, MELINDA

Amongst the hardest things I've had to do
Was commit my spouse to the asylum
So now I'm stuck here with a stack of bills!
    Piles and piles and piles and piles of 'em!

"A woman is a burdened thing,"
Yeah, we've *always* known it to be true.
But what do I say to my little Joanna?
    "Your daddy's brain has lost a screw?"

No, no, that won't do—
A child shouldn't have to carry *that* weight.
So I rely on a classic, cliched canard:
    "Yer pa's gonna be home a little late!"

Now here I am signing check after check
(No doubt a few will bounce)
Electricity, gas, cable, the rent—
    The mortgage for our stucco house!

Joanna, my dear, if you only knew
What your father has done to our lives.
Momma will have to take a second job
    Or they might turn off our lights!

## THE SMOOCH

Another thing that Thomas saw
During the rupture of his psyche
Was a woman with a giant head
On a body way too tiny!
"Give me a kiss, love," the head entreated
But Tom was NOT in the mood
So the head accused him of being prudish
(And also unspeakably rude!).

"It's my proportions, ain't it?" the vision sobbed
And pouted her gigantic lips.
"It's not that," Thomas lied. "No, not at all—
"It's just...I've got a wife and a kid."

The woman with the giant head
(And teeniest little body...)
Looked Thomas in the eyes and said,
"I just wish someone would want me."

Thomas felt bad—she seemed so alone
So he pursed his puckers tightly
And leaned in close for an invisible kiss
With a chimera quite unsightly!

## A CUTE THING DYING IN THE CORNER

The very next night, Thomas awoke
To the raw sound of near-total agony
And there in the corner, bleeding out of his gut
Was something furry, and fuzzy, and...rabbit-y.

"I'm a Figglybump," the small creature said
Though that meant nothing at all to Thomas
"Adoraville's gone, General BubblyStraw's dead!"
"The end is now surely upon us!"

He was unbearably cute, this wounded delusion
As he spoke, "Hey, you, mister..."
"I been shot in the belly; my time's running thin—
Could you tell Fluffykins that I miss her?"

Thomas called out for a new round of meds
To banish this pained apparition.
He lay back supine, sunk into his bed
And wondered Melinda's position.

## KEEPING THE LIGHTS ON

The litany of bills was piling up high
From the desk all the way to the ceiling
So Melinda thought how she might make her some scratch:
Telemarketing, substituting...*stealing*?

None of these options were quite of the sort
Where Melinda thought she would succeed
So she decided right there: "I'll be an **escort**!"
"And charge men for doing the deed!"

She felt some small shame at this hasty decision
I mean, sure, it looks bad at first glance
But selling your body for premium television
Is just part of the American dance!

We must suffer indignity; no one's exempt
For an existence that's *quite often* crappy.
Melinda lets strangers take her to bed
...to keep her young daughter happy.

And where is Thomas, that miserable shit?
(Locked up and zonked out on pills...)
Melinda will never forgive him for this:
"I screw now to pay all our bills!"

## THAT FIRST PUFF

While her mom was giving men head for cash
And her father was getting dosed daily
Joanna discovered her parents' old stash
Of cigarettes, bourbon, and brandy.

She took a small puff—surprisingly sweet
As she sucked in that poisonous smoke.
"My mother is selling herself on the street—
So what if I takes me a toke?"

In no time at all, she was drunk as a skunk
And palling around with *bad* kids.
I'd give you a list, but it'd be way too long
Of the terrible things that they did.

Suffice it to say Joanna was changed
Another young soul gone too quick!
She was warped, twisted-up, a little deranged
And robbed of her sweet innocence.

# MEMORY SHMEMORY

They say there's a gremlin
(A little green man)
Who has access to inside your brain.

He goes about pilferin'
With his gnarled little hand
All the memories you done gone saved.

He showed up today
In Thomas's room
And climbed up on top of his shoulders

And with but a stretch
Of his icky green pointer
Made Thomas **forget** growing older.

"I'm just a kid,"
Thomas yelled out
With a joy so completely sublime.

He jumped on his bed
He gave out a shout
"I'm Tommy and I'm only nine!"

The orderlies heard this
And went right to work
Reminding our boy of the truth:

"You're crazy, you're batty,
You're locked up with ***us***...
And really, quite long in the tooth!"

## KLONOPIN, VALIUM, LAUDANUM, BENZOS

Klonopin, valium, laudanum, benzos
Thomas takes all of 'em when the smiling man says so.
"I'm zonked."
"I'm tired."
"I don't think they're working."
(Though the seroquel does keep his right knee from jerking.)

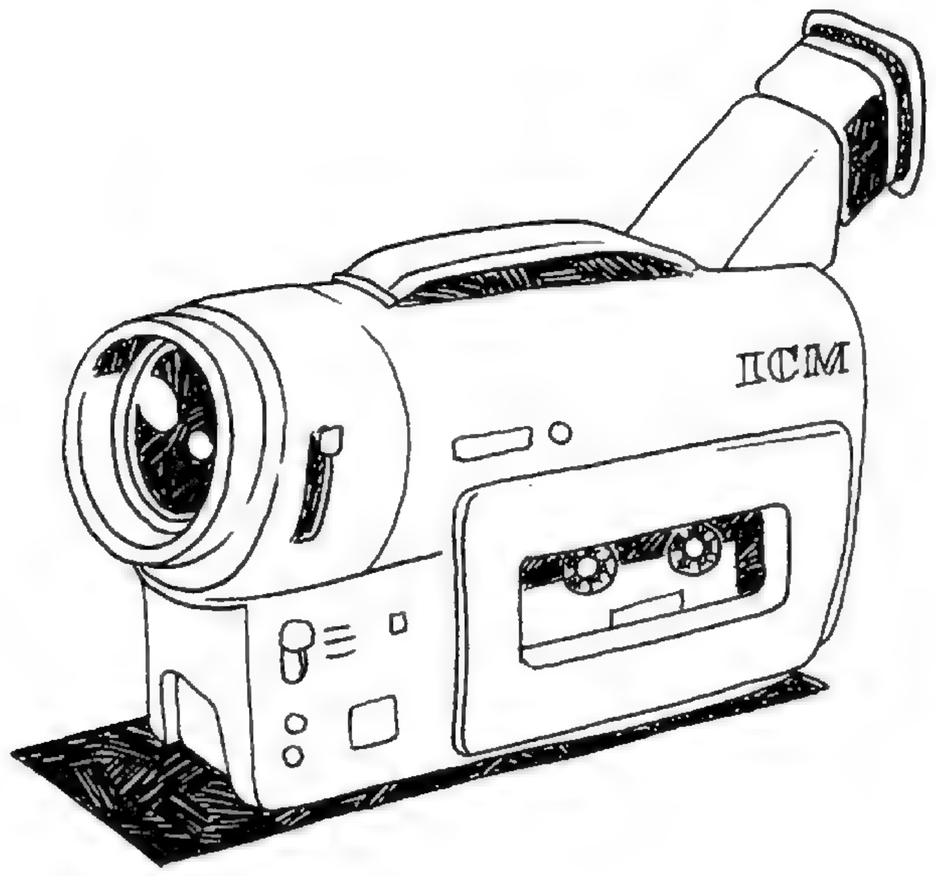
Ativan is calming
Oxy burns your throat
Higher
And higher
and higher, Tom floats!
With Klonopin, valium, laudanum, and benzos.

Klonopin, valium, laudanum, benzos
They *interact*, reaching an awful crescendo...
"Hold on!"
"Stop!"
"I'm starting to see bugs!"
But the smiling man just keeps plying Tom drugs.

Which are: klonopin, valium, laudanum, and benzos
Thomas must take them again and again, so
The bugs keep a-crawling
The visions persist
"Thomas, it's now time for dose number six."

## THE CAPITAL-T TRUTH
## (A HAIKU)

Every little thing
Is fragmented—atomized
Like a bunch of **bugs**.




## THE CAMCORDER

One afternoon, the strangest thing happened:
An orderly came with a sedative smoothie
But on the cart next to the drink and the napkins
Was a camera one uses to make at-home movies.

Despite his deep fear
Of getting in trouble
Thomas reached out
And tried to be subtle...

He grabbed the device!
But the guard didn't notice
Tom's swift sleight of hand—
His slick hocus pocus!

Our boy slipped the camcorder
Beneath his pillow
And when the orderly left
Recorded this video:

Is this thing--

Is it *working*?

*Hello*. My name is Thomas Venderbeck.

My wife's name is *Melinda Venderbeck*, and we have a daughter, Joanna.

I think I'm in a ***psych ward*** of some kind. And now I've got this... *camera*.

There's this **guy**, I think maybe he might *run* the place...

He comes in and ***reads*** to me *every morning*.

*"It's a children's book,"* he says.

***"Little poems."***

His **smile**... I can't describe it. It's so **bright** and also so...so...

Like *light* reflected through ***black stained glass***...

Does that make any *sense*?!

And whenever he begins to read...

The *stories*. ***Poems*** or *whatever*...

They're about *me*.

*All of the poems are about ME!!!!*

"This is the story of the rest of your life," he tells me.

"With a sprinkle of ***whimsy***."

But the poems are all ***terrible***, and no matter how hard I try...

I ***do*** the stuff in the stanzas!

I tried to **hang** myself on that thing.

And I keep seeing all these... ***creatures***.

Some of them are, like... ***monsters***.

But then the others...

...was the man with eyes on his fingers counting to ten...

***OR STARING RIGHT AT ME??***

And is Melinda a ***prostitute*** now?

Is that ***real***?

I don't know ***what*** to believe. He's got me on *experimental sedatives.*

"A spoon full of sugar..."

...and he said something to me the other day.

Something I can't shake from my mind...

*"Once the book is over, so are YOU."*

What does that *mean*?

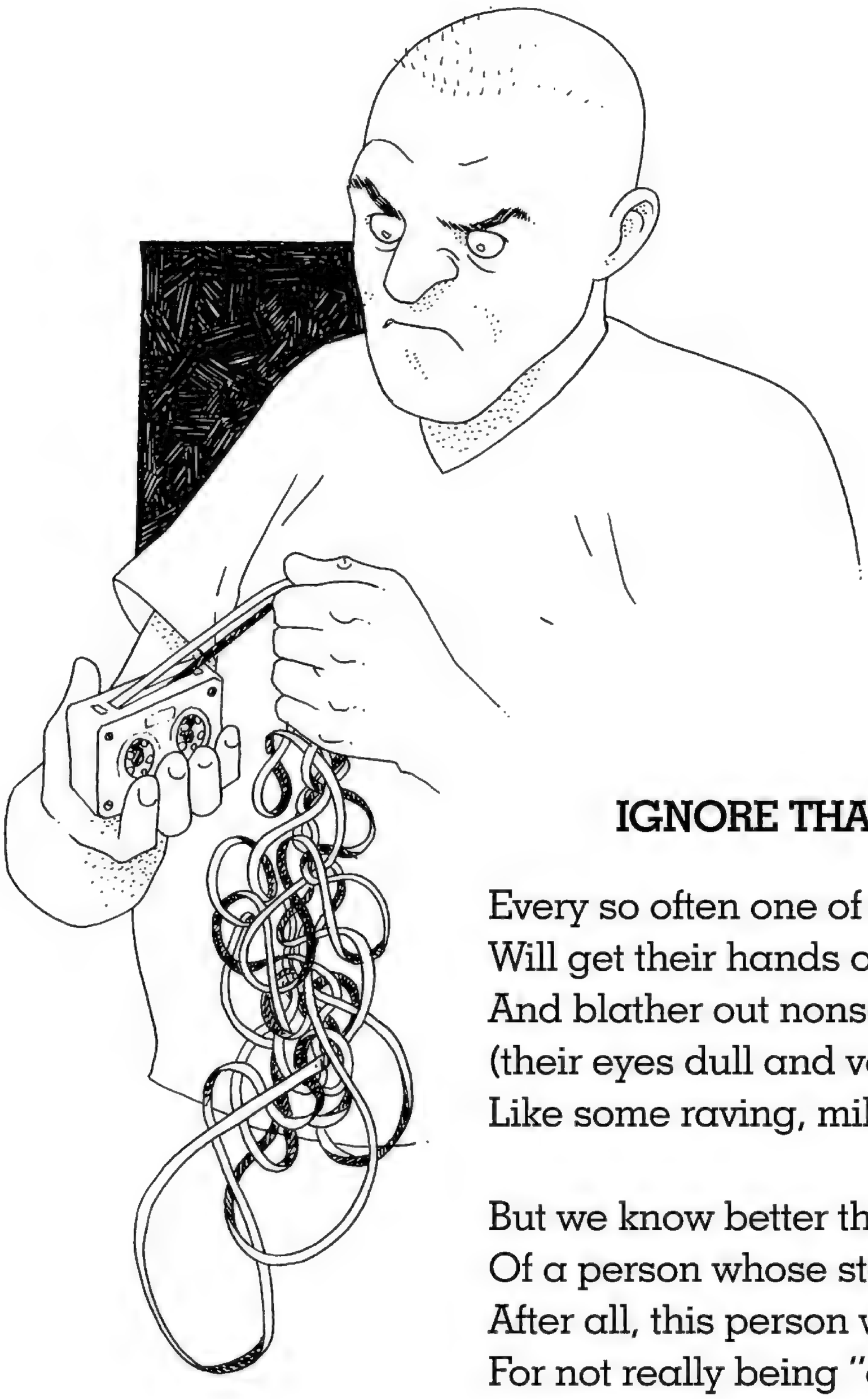
*Do I die when the poems are done??*

I have no idea what's happening! But either way: *please*, I beg of you:

If you're reading this... ***story...***

Don't tur anoth pag

*Don't finish it!*



## IGNORE THAT, PLEASE

Every so often one of our patients
Will get their hands on equipment
And blather out nonsense
(their eyes dull and vacant)
Like some raving, milk-hungry infant.

But we know better than to listen to words
Of a person whose status is: "***committed***."
After all, this person was entrusted to us
For not really being "quite with it."

So if you watched a video before
In which Thomas begged for assistance
Just ignore it, please—forget his whole spiel!
The poor chap's brain is all twisted!

You can't kill someone with a poem or rhyme!
I mean, a sonnet is hardly a mace.
So forget that recording, put it out of your mind
And rest assured—the thing's been erased.

# THE WHORE AND THE HOOLIGAN

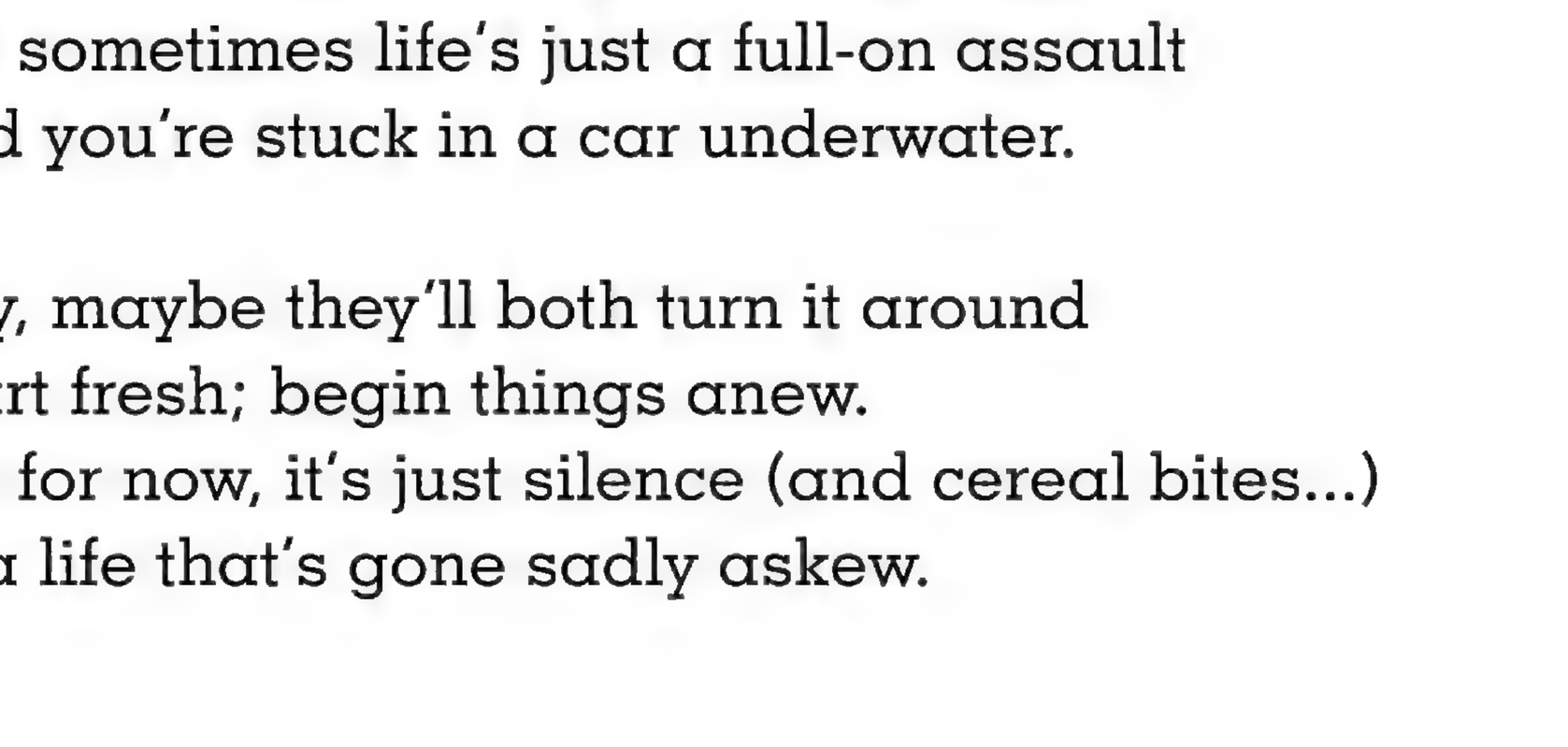
Breakfast was quiet—not a hint of sound
As Melinda sat across from Joanna.
Both were looking a bit worse for the wear
Like two over-ripened bananas.

"Where were you last night?" asked daughter to mom.
Mom said, "I had a guy stuck on top'a me."
"What about you?" asked mother to child
"Outside defacing public property."

This, my friends, is how trauma works
It spreads like contagious disease;
First, Thomas was institutionalized
And now his girls are deep in the weeds.

I'm not saying that it's all Tommy's fault
Nor Melinda's, or her poor daughter's
But sometimes life's just a full-on assault
And you're stuck in a car underwater.

Hey, maybe they'll both turn it around
Start fresh; begin things anew.
But for now, it's just silence (and cereal bites...)
In a life that's gone sadly askew.



# THE TERMINAL RULE

There is not a thing in this world, my friends
(Including the round world itself)
That doesn't come quickly to some tragic end
—*the inevitable dusting of the mere mortal shelf!*

Your comrades will die, your family will fall apart
It's the swan song of the modern age!
Everything's fragmented, split, atomized.
(Remember that haiku from the previous page?)

The sidewalk ends, the sentence ends
Your marriage ends, your second marriage ends
Your vitality ends, your intelligence ends
The movie ends. The day? It always ends.

As does the night—and the afternoon, too.
The song, the story, the big game—*toodeloo*!
**All of it's** subject to the **Terminal Rule**:
*"The great cosmic skein will slowly unspool."*

And yeah, it's quite sad, to think just how brief,
Are our pitiful, pitiable lives...
We flitter and flutter like some dumb autumn leaf
Who floats willingly toward a ghastly demise.

From the moment you're born
You begin then to die.
It's cradle to casket
—*in the blink of an eye!*

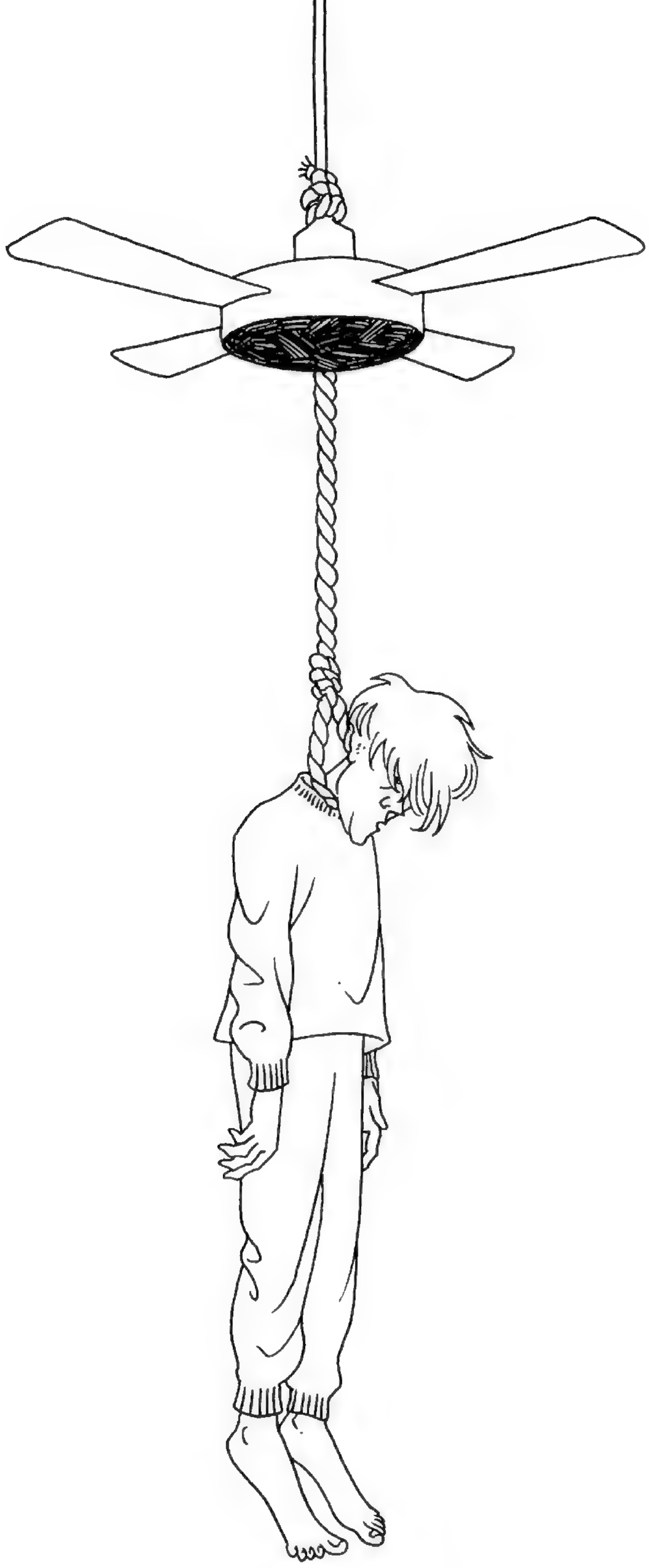
Some go too quick
And some stay too long
But by hook or by crook
We'll all be *gone*.

I wish I could tell you
That there's some greater meaning
To the horrible truth
That everything's fleeting

But it's completely arbitrary;
there is *no* grand design.
This thing you call life?
It's ***ravaged*** by time.

This bedlam, this madness—
Tossed right to the breeze!
Our reality's **SNOT**
From a celestial sneeze!

As for dear Thomas
I'm sure he'll be fine.
A spoon full of sugar...
And dose number nine.



## WHOOPS

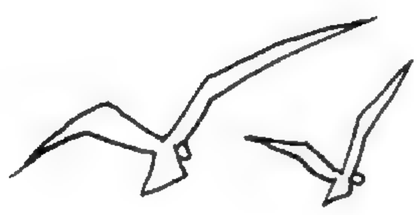
...I guess I was wrong about him being *"fine."*
So sue me for keeping a smidgen of hope.
But Thomas, that mischievous, rascally swine
Done went and found stronger rope!

# THE BEST DAY

Now what have we here? Something quite odd:
A memory plucked out of time
Of Thomas L. Venderbeck (recently gone)
When he was the young age of nine.

It was a placid Sunday; the air bore a chill
And the suburbs simmered with sadness
But Tommy was happy as a piggy in shit
Just the same as his hardworking dad was.

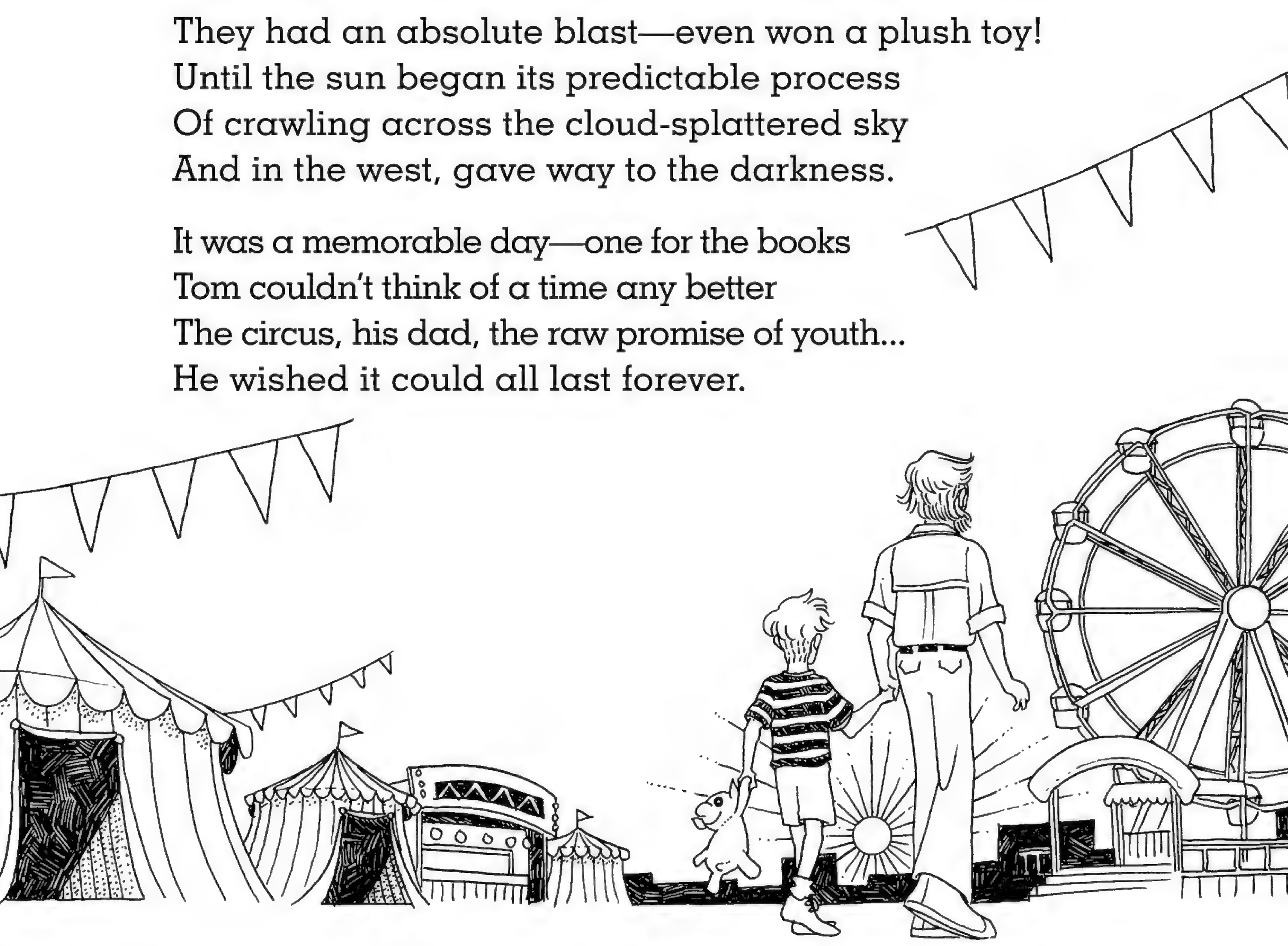
They hopped in the car and followed the map
To the tents of the traveling circus.
Thomas was beaming, excited, so rapt...
And by golly, a little bit nervous!



But once they walked in, that all faded away
As he beheld the carnival's riches:
The rides, the food, the clowns, all the sounds!
"I want more of whatever this is!"

They had an absolute blast—even won a plush toy!
Until the sun began its predictable process
Of crawling across the cloud-splattered sky
And in the west, gave way to the darkness.

It was a memorable day—one for the books
Tom couldn't think of a time any better
The circus, his dad, the raw promise of youth...
He wished it could all last forever.



I'm *dead* serious. I was strolling along and the sidewalk just--

*ended.*

I'm not gonna argue with that poem from before, the one about everything ending.

Technically speaking, it's ***absolutely true.***

*Everything* must come to a close.

I wonder how far ***down*** it goes...

But the poem **misses** something ***important*** in all its dour slant rhyme and **linguistic acrobatics...**

I can't explain it with ***words***, man.

You're just gonna have to get over here and see for yourself.

The fact that we **know** things will end actually presents each of us with an **amazing choice:**

*What will you do with the limited time you get on this spinning rock?*

The clock is ticking...

The end is nigh...

So what will you do?

# *The End*

# VARIANT COVERS

*What follows are variant covers for each issue of Swan Songs.*

ISSUE 1 VARIANT BY
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ISSUE 4 WALKING DEAD VARIANT BY
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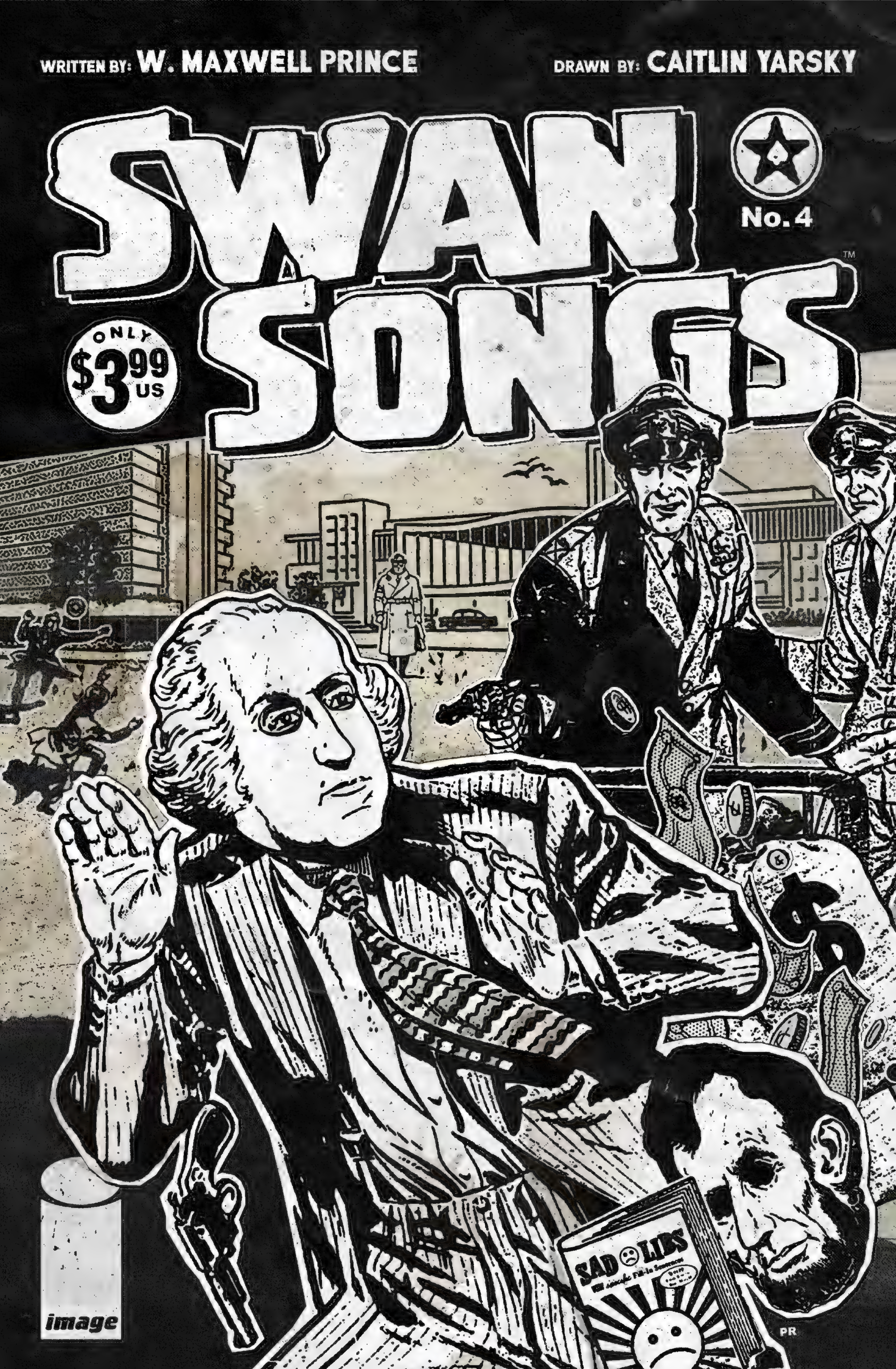


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*And that's the end of the endings.*

*Thanks.*

# *Everything Ends...*

**Mastermind W. MAXWELL PRINCE continues to push the comics envelope with *SWAN SONGS*—a moving, multi-artist anthology that explores the way things end... and also how they never really do.**

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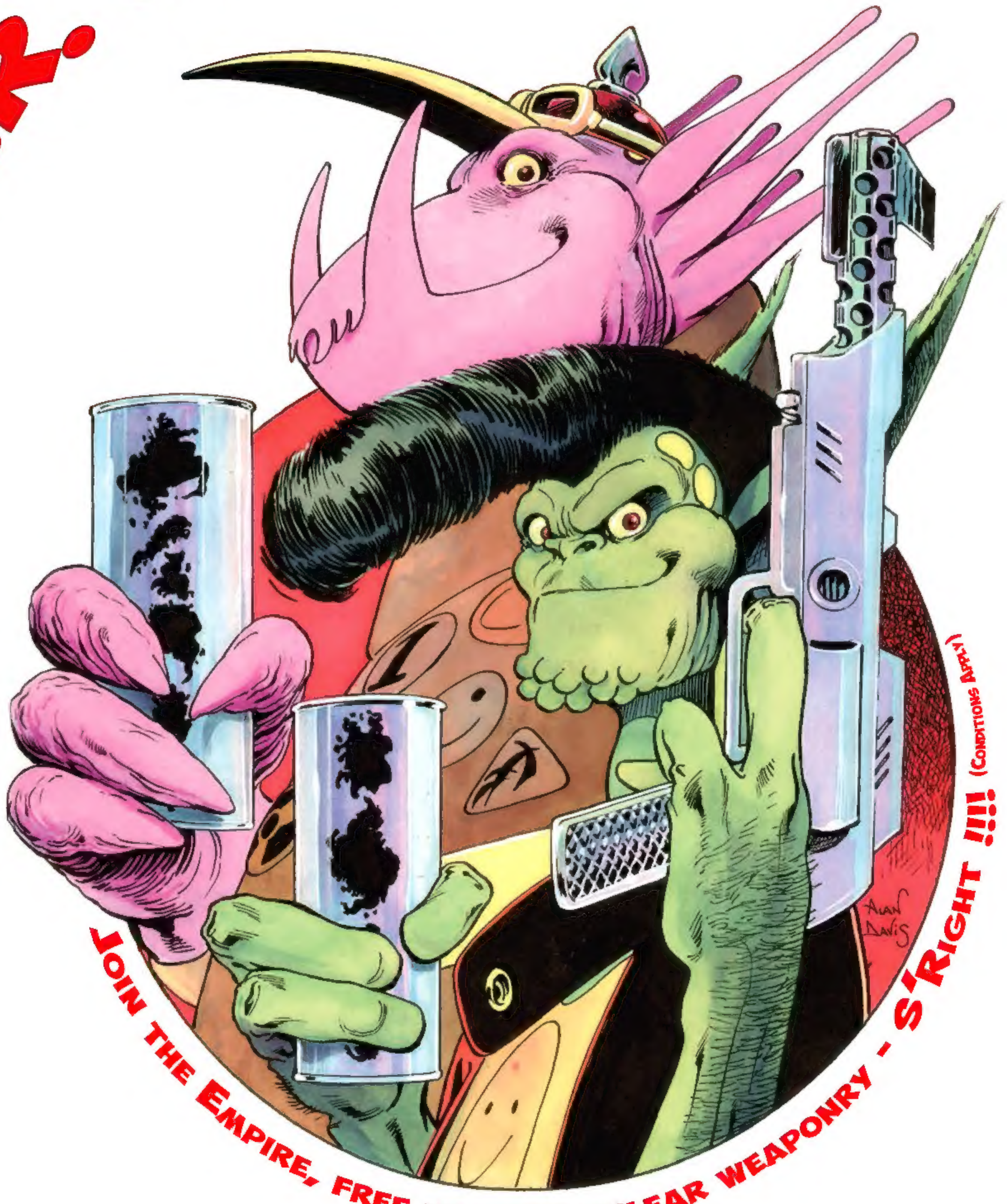


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